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SUBJECT: ABU SHOUK TRIBAL LEADERS PROVIDE VIEWS ON SECURITY, DPA

¶1. SUMMARY: Tribal leaders from Abu Shouk IDP camp pointed out shortcomings in the DPA, but many also noted their support for the document and desire to learn more about it. The group emphasized the need for rapid implementation of the agreement and unanimously favored a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. END SUMMARY.

¶2. ARC Officer, accompanied by two USAID colleagues, met July 18 for three hours with a group of 22 tribal leaders, omdas and sheiks from Abu Shouk internally displaced persons (IDP) camp to discuss the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), security, and general conditions in the camp. Several leaders opined on the inadequacies of the DPA, including its lack of buy-in from all the rebel movements, absence of individual compensation, and shortcomings in providing for the disarmament of Janjaweed. ARC Officer countered that while not all parties signed the agreement, efforts continued to persuade the JEM and SLA-Abdel Wahid to lend their support to the DPA, and the international community clearly recognized the need to expand popular support for the accord. ARC Officer also noted the specific DPA articles relating to compensation, which provide for individual compensation, and acknowledged the pressing need to operationalize and publicize the compensation committees called for in the DPA.

SOME RECOGNITION THAT DPA MAY BE NEXT BEST ALTERNATIVE

¶3. Despite the reservations conveyed by several omdas regarding the DPA, many of the tribal leaders expressed the need for a pragmatic approach and even outright support for the agreement. One sheik commented that there was a growing recognition that the DPA, while imperfect, was a reality that could lead to amelioration of the situation in Darfur. He stated that much of the initial resistance to the document was the result of misinformation and, in part, AMIS' failure to sufficiently explain the accord and its provisions, which many Darfurians find confusing. The sheik emphasized that IDPs at Abu Shouk want and need to learn about the DPA. He urged the international community to take steps to provide such information quickly in a way that would be easily understandable to the predominantly illiterate camp population. Like other leaders, he highlighted the importance of expeditiously establishing the various DPA committees, particularly on compensation, to tangibly demonstrate implementation of the agreement.

¶4. ARC officer explained the importance of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC) as a mechanism to resolve many of the "gaps" in the DPA, and emphasized that the DPA is not the final answer to Darfur's problems but rather a framework for a process. Tribal leaders expressed appreciation for this clarification, but noted it would have been useful for the AU to have made this more clear to months ago. However, they articulated their fear that without proactive organization by the AU and UNMIS, the GNU would quickly hijack the dialogue. Many of sheiks and omdas stressed the necessity of genuine inclusiveness in any regional dialogue - meaning that non-signatories to the DPA must be encouraged to participate and provided some political incentive in so doing.

(NOTE: One tribal leader held that closing the door on the possibility of non-signatory political participation effectively excluded those groups and made them more likely to play spoiler roles. He echoed the sentiment of others that a Darfurian should hold a vice president position in the GNU. END NOTE.)

FRUSTRATION WITH AMIS CONTINUES

¶ 15. Numerous tribal leaders underscored their frustration with AMIS.

They remarked that not only did the force lack the capacity to ensure security, but that it also was increasingly viewed as a party to the conflict rather than as an impartial body. Nonetheless, several sheiks and omdas urged their peers to take a more balanced and realistic view of the peace process and AMIS, given its mandate and resource constraints. "After three years of war, we cannot have peace in only three months," one participant observed. The group unanimously expressed its support for UN peacekeepers in Darfur and urged the United States and other members of the international community to continue pressuring the GNU to accept such a force.

¶ 16. The group offered little specifics on the impact of recent fighting in North Darfur, except to note the increase in the IDP population and reluctance to return to home villages. Responding to Field Officer's query about the means of transmitting news, leaders related that most information was conveyed by word of mouth and little stock was put into either the local radio or newspapers, which are government controlled. None of the participants were willing to offer opinions or perspectives on the G-19 or National Redemption Front.

¶ 17. COMMENT: The tribal leaders appreciated airing their views to USG officials -- an opportunity, they claim, they have not fully had

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with AMIS. Their cautiously supportive comments on the DPA could represent a shift from earlier positions that were anti-DPA. Contrary to many anecdotal accounts, the sheiks and omdas were clearly interested in better understanding the DPA and the plan for implementation. Furthermore, they understood the importance of educating the IDP population about the accord and, when offered a few copies of the USAID-translated Arabic summary of the DPA, they snapped them up without hesitation. They even requested additional copies, which were later provided, to disseminate at the Abu Shouk IDP camp, encouraged a structured DPA education campaign in the IDP camps. The lack of credible information in the camps should serve as additional impetus to launch a "DPA outreach" campaign focused on the IDP population. While many tribal leaders' guardedly positive attitude on the DPA might be reason for some optimism, this perspective will undoubtedly reverse direction if concrete actions to implement the agreement and demonstrate peace dividends are not taken in the near-term. END COMMENT.

STEINFELD